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UNCLAS ZAGREB 000834

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EUR/SCE - KABUMOTO, BENEDICT, GAUDIOSI, ENGLISH

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SR](#) [HR](#)

SUBJECT: LOCAL ETHNIC TENSIONS RISE IN ELECTION WAKE

REF: A. ZAGREB 827

[1](#)B. ZAGREB 792

[1](#)1. (SBU) An unfortunate convergence of events has stirred anger and fear among some small-town Croats, sparking several incidents of ethnic hatred against Serbs. The May 9 USG presentation of the Legion of Merit to the relatives of Chetnik leader Draza Mihailovic; the May 10 reports of proposed changes to the Hague Tribunal's indictment against Croatian Generals Ivan Cermak and Mladen Markac, interpreted as an indictment of the entire nation; the May 15 Chetnik rally in Ravna Gora with the participation of SaM FM Vuk Draskovic; and inflammatory May 15 Croatian news coverage of Serb refugees bussed in to vote at local elections -- these have all become intertwined in the minds of a portion of the Croatian public, particularly in war-affected areas, and reinforced the "cult of victimhood" still prevalent in some places ten years after Dayton. The results range from disappointing to tragic. Anti-Serb graffiti has appeared in the south-central town of Gracac featuring the infamous slogan "Srbe na vrbe") translating to "Serbs in the willows," the rough equivalent of "Hang 'em high." In Vojnic, between Karlovac and the Bosnian border, loyalists of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) threatened Social Democratic Party (SDP) Mayor Branko Eremic, an ethnic Serb, assaulted one of his supporters at the mayor's home on election night, and stoned the car of one of Eremic's coalition partners, local Imam Azim Durmic. On May 18, the body of an 84-year-old Serb refugee who had returned to vote was found in Donji Karin near Zadar, reportedly murdered on election night.

[1](#)2. (SBU) These tensions have also crept into the politics surrounding local governing coalitions, which are still being negotiated in the majority of towns and counties where no party won enough assembly seats to govern alone. In Knin, it appears increasingly likely that the local HDZ chapter will form a coalition with the far-right Croatian Party of Rights and Croatian Block and shut the Independent Serbian Democratic Party (SDSS) out of local government despite their first place finish (8 of 17 seats) on the 15th. Callers to a Croatian TV talk show last night explained their sentiments: Serbs in government in Knin -- former capital of the self-proclaimed Serbian Republic of the Krajina (RSK) during the war -- equals RSK all over again. Post is carefully looking into these incidents to evaluate the local situation.

BILATERAL RELATIONS CALM - DESPITE POLITICS

[1](#)3. (SBU) At the national level, both PM Sanader and Serbian Ambassador Misa Simurdic have assured Post that bilateral relations remain stable. Regularly scheduled diplomatic consultations are continuing. President Mesic, after recently cancelling a planned trip to Serbia in reaction to FM Draskovic's participation in the Chetnik rally, announced his opposition to PM Sanader's proposed government declaration condemning the Chetnik movement, saying the GoC should not escalate the situation. Sanader's threat yesterday to re-impose a visa regime on SaM is viewed as empty, made simply to provide domestic political cover and let the public know the GoC is not taking Serbian actions lightly. The

implication
of all this is clear: PM Sanader may have pointed Zagreb
toward
Europe, but he still has work to do in the field.
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